

Statement by Robert E. Brown, Jr.
Acting Deputy Director for Supply Reduction
Office of National Drug Control Policy
Before the House Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
On U.S. Air Interdiction Efforts in South America after the Peru Incident
May 1, 2001

Introduction

Good afternoon. Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, all of us at the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) appreciate your longstanding support and interest in all aspects of drug control policy, as well as the guidance and leadership of the House Committee on Government Reform. A terrible tragedy has occurred, and we extend our condolences to James Bowers and all of the family and friends of Roni and Charity Bowers . We also express our concern for the health of Kevin Donaldson, who piloted the plane and saved the lives of the other passengers on board.

This tragedy occurred within the context of what has been a remarkably successful U.S.--supported international drug control program. Clearly, when implemented, all parties believed that the established procedures would protect against loss of innocent life both in the air and on the ground. Now, after this tragedy, we need to take a close look to see whether the policies or their implementation need to be adjusted. The Administration has suspended U.S. participation in air interdiction programs in Colombia and Peru until it determines what went tragically awry in this incident. We should withhold discussion on the particular facts surrounding this tragic accident until ongoing investigations and program reviews are complete. With this in mind, I would like to focus my testimony today on the strategic purposes that have led three Administrations to provide support to Colombian and Andean air interdiction programs and to briefly outline the accomplishments of these programs to date.

The Strategic Context for Drug Control.

Illegal drugs exact a staggering cost on American society, accounting for about 50,000 drug-related deaths a year and an estimated \$110 billion annually in social costs. Cocaine inflicts most drug related damage to American society, enslaving over 3 million hard core addicts and sending more than 160,000 Americans to hospital emergency rooms annually. In producer countries such as Colombia and Peru, illegal drug production puts money and power into the hands of criminal elements and illegal armed groups. Drug trafficking exacerbates corruption, generates violence against civil society, causes environmental degradation, and

promotes political and economic instability. It constitutes a threat to the national security of the United States and other involved countries.

Our *National Drug Control Strategy* is a balanced plan to reduce the demand for illegal drugs through prevention and treatment, reduce drug-related crime and violence through law enforcement, and to reduce the supply of illegal drugs domestically and abroad. Within the Office of National Drug Control Policy, I lead the Office of Supply Reduction. My office is responsible for developing U.S. international drug control strategy and coordinating the efforts of U.S. departments and agencies involved in international drug control.

International Supply Reduction and the *National Drug Control Strategy*

Although reducing the demand for illegal drugs is the centerpiece of the *National Drug Control Strategy*, supply reduction is an essential component of a well-balanced strategic approach to drug control. Cheap and readily available drugs undercut the effectiveness of demand reduction programs because they draw in new users and increase the population of potential addicts. Restricted availability and higher prices: hold down the number of first-time users; prevent aggressive marketing of illegal drugs to the most at-risk population by criminal drug organizations; and reduce the human, social, and economic costs of drug abuse. Supply reduction enforcement programs also provide a strong prevention message that controlled drugs are harmful.

Internationally, supply reduction includes coordinated investigations; interdiction; drug crop eradication; control of precursors; anti-money-laundering initiatives; alternative development linked to eradication; strengthening of public institutions; foreign assistance; and reinforcement of political will. These programs, are implemented through bilateral, regional, and global accords. They not only reduce the volume of illegal drugs that reach the U.S., they also attack the power and pocketbook of international criminal organizations which threaten our national security, strengthen democratic institutions in allied nations under attack from illegal drug trafficking and consumption, and honor our international commitments to cooperate against illegal drugs.

The Andean Regional Initiative -- the Vital Role of Interdiction

The illicit industry that cultivates coca and produces, transports, and markets cocaine is vulnerable to effective law enforcement action. Coca, the raw material for cocaine, is produced exclusively in the Andean region of South America. U.S. intelligence knows precisely the geographic coordinates of the growing areas. Trafficking routes must link to these growing areas to move precursor chemicals into cocaine labs and cocaine products out towards the market. Coca cultivation and production is labor intensive and requires sufficient infrastructure to feed and house the labor force and provide sufficient transportation to support the production process and move product to market. The industry can only thrive in geographic areas devoid of effective law enforcement control.

Air interdiction can play a vital role in the establishment of effective law enforcement control over coca cultivation and production regions. Source country interdiction supports our

international drug control strategy in two ways. Directly, interdiction assures that the illegal drugs captured or destroyed will do no further harm. Indirectly, and more powerfully, interdiction fundamentally disrupts illegal drug production when it eliminates a link in the production chain.

The recent history of drug control in Peru shows the potential of the program. In 1995, over 60 percent of the world's coca was grown in Peru. Local Peruvian farmers converted the coca leaf into cocaine base, an intermediate product much less bulky than coca leaf. The cocaine base was then transported by light aircraft to Colombia, where it would be further processed into cocaine hydrochloride and transported on to the world market. Prior to 1995, an average of 600 drug trafficking flights transited along the Peru-to-Colombia air bridge each year. This air transport link from Peru to Colombia was vulnerable to disruption.

U.S. support to Peruvian air interdiction dates back to the early 1990's. Although there were some early successes in the program, it failed to achieve major disruptions in the illicit cocaine industry. The program was suspended in 1994 when it became known that U.S. government officials could be prosecuted under U.S. law if they provided intelligence information used to force down civilian aircraft in flight.

Later that year, Congress passed a new law that permitted U.S. officials to assist other nations in the interdiction of drug trafficking aircraft. In the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1995, Congress provided a procedure for allowing U.S. government employees to assist foreign nations in the interdiction of aircraft when there is "reasonable suspicion" that the aircraft is primarily engaged in illicit drug trafficking. This law provided for this activity in cases where (1) the aircraft is reasonably suspected to be primarily engaged in illicit drug trafficking, and (2) the President of the United States has determined that (a) interdiction is necessary because of the extraordinary threat posed by illicit drug trafficking to the national security of that foreign country, and (b) the country has appropriate procedures in place to protect against innocent loss of life in the air or on the ground in connection with such interdiction, which at a minimum shall include effective means to identify and warn an aircraft before the use of force is directed against the aircraft.

The United States began providing assistance to Peruvian air interdiction programs again in March, 1995. The results were immediate and dramatic. Between March, 1995 and the end of 1996, the Government of Peru had forced down or seized on the ground many aircraft. Drug trafficking pilots were no longer willing to fly into the central growing regions. Coca farmers could no longer move their coca products to market. The price for coca leaf and cocaine base in Peru collapsed. Coca farmers could not feed their families. By the summer of 1996, the U.S. embassy in Lima was reporting widespread hunger in the coca growing regions. Coca farmers began abandoning their illicit crops, clamored for U.S. alternative development assistance, and welcomed the presence of the Peruvian governmental institutions necessary to deliver aid. USAID rapidly established a \$25 million alternative development program for the region that provided the coca farmers immediate relief and speeded their transition to licit sources of income. At the same time, the power and reach of Peruvian law enforcement institutions expanded into these growing areas and began eradicating illicit coca from public lands. By the

end of 1997, the coca crop had been reduced in Peru by 40 percent. Dramatic reductions have continued; by the end of 2000, coca cultivation was less than one-third of its 1995 totals.

The cocaine industry in Peru has suffered long-term disruption due to the successful implementation of a synchronized, coordinated, multifaceted U.S.--supported Peruvian drug control campaign that included vital interdiction, alternative development, eradication, and expanded law enforcement programs. The air interdiction program achieved the first, vital disruption of the industry, depressed prices received by coca farmers, and established conditions for successful alternative development and law enforcement programs. By first destroying the profitability of coca, long-term drug control successes were achieved in Peru without risk of violent confrontation with the coca labor force.

It is noteworthy as well that law enforcement and interdiction programs are mutually reinforcing. Intelligence developed by monitoring routes and supporting interdiction programs is useful for the sort of investigations undertaken by the DEA. Route information can also be obtained or amplified through law enforcement cases.

Source Country Interdiction Programs Today

The Andean Region nations face considerable challenges today. Democracy is under pressure there, in large measure because of funds derived from narcotics production and trafficking available to well-armed anti-democratic groups. Illegal armed groups at both ends of the political spectrum control almost all Colombian coca growing and production areas and derive a significant proportion of their total income from supporting this outlaw industry. U.S. support to Plan Colombia envisions establishing a Colombian version of the multifaceted drug control campaign that has proven so effective in Peru and Bolivia. In Colombia, as in Peru, the goal of U.S. support to interdiction is to assist the host government in isolating the coca-growing region, to keep precursor chemicals out, and to prevent the coca farmers from moving their crops to market. As the government of Colombia, with substantial U.S. assistance, begins to make inroads against the massive increase in coca production in areas under illegal armed group control, drug traffickers will look for new sources of coca supply.

Since mid-1998 coca leaf prices in Peru and Bolivia have nearly quadrupled, although the governments in those two nations have done an excellent job of keeping the amount of coca production low. In Peru, rebounding prices indicate that some traffickers have successfully adapted to the airbridge interdiction program and have found new ways to move reduced amounts of product to market. Traffickers are now substituting land and river transportation for air routes. Drug trafficking aircraft avoid long flight times over Peruvian territory and usually limit their flights to short cross border flights to pick up drugs from Peruvian staging areas near the border. In addition, there is evidence that smugglers have recently attempted illegal flights south over Bolivia and Brazil to bring cocaine to market through more indirect routes.

With the price incentive as it is, it will be necessary to support Peru and Bolivia, as well as Ecuador and other regional countries, to assure that coca production does not migrate as a result of pressure being exerted in Colombia. The Administration has requested \$882 million in non-DOD funds in the FY-2002 budget for the Andean Regional Initiative to be applied in

Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. About half of the assistance is for Colombia's neighbors, while the remainder is for sustaining ongoing programs in Colombia. The assistance is nearly evenly split between promotion of democracy and law enforcement and security assistance.

Reviewing Processes and Procedures

Clearly, something went tragically awry to cause the incident on April 20, 2001. The United States has suspended its support for air interdiction programs in Peru and Colombia pending the outcome of program reviews in both countries and a joint investigation begun April 30, 2001 in Peru. The United States is well-represented by an experienced interagency team led by the Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Rand Beers. After all of the facts have been gathered, we will be in a better position to make determinations about what issues need to be addressed and how to proceed. We will keep the Congress informed as we move ahead in this process. For now, our thoughts remain with the family and friends of Roni and Charity Bowers, and we hope for the speedy recovery of Kevin Donaldson.

Conclusion

On April 21, 2001, at the Summit of the Americas, President Bush said:

"Too many people in our hemisphere grow, sell, and use illegal drugs. The United States is responsible to fight its own demand for drugs. And we will expand our efforts to work with producer and transit countries to fortify their democratic institutions, promote sustainable development, and fight the supply of drugs at the source."

The U.S. counter-drug strategy is multi-faceted and long term in response to a problem that has similar characteristics. A crucial element in the strategy is reduction of the supply of drugs and a key part of supply reduction has been disruption of the illegal drug production and marketing process. By breaking the link between coca fields and cocaine laboratories, U.S.-supported Andean programs caused a collapse of the coca market in Peru and Bolivia that has had major long-term consequences. U.S.-supported international drug control programs have reduced the global potential supply of cocaine by seventeen per cent since 1995. As the government of Colombia moves against coca production in its territory it will be increasingly important to assure that drug traffickers are not easily able to find new growing areas in Peru and Bolivia.

As we seek the most appropriate and effective way to reduce drug supply it is most important to thoroughly examine our programs and their implementation. We must assure ourselves that whatever action we take is effective, that risks are appropriately balanced against rewards, and that every precaution is taken to assure that programs are implemented to make them as safe as they can be in an often dangerous environment.